



Gas Canopies



Auto Repair Shops



Choices

Parking Lot Landscaping



Franchise Signs



Building Facades

Strength in Local Decision Making

Choices have consequences that can last a lifetime.

The Greenway Compact Program will help translate widely shared community values into coordinated action with visible results. The method is making good planning choices.

Every municipality makes choices that change neighborhoods and landscapes; each choice can add to or detract from the character of a village, town, or city. Many decisions reverberate beyond borders. True choices involve deciding what is most desirable for the community as a whole, not merely approving each proposal as it comes along, perhaps with a few concessions.

Developers cannot be blamed for unacceptable projects if they have followed the rules. We cannot blame a developer for reluctance to go back to the drawing board again and again while a local Planning Board struggles with site-specific design policy. Clearly presented plans and guidelines that indicate what the community wants -- and does not want -- save developers and public decision makers time, money, aggravation, and potential lawsuits.

If we want new buildings to be compatible with existing neighborhoods, we must say so up front. If we want better landscaping and pedestrian connections, instead of parking lots in front of buildings, we must say so.

Will our future look more like the residential sprawl and commercial congestion in sections of nearby Long Island, or will it resemble Dutchess County's traditional landscape pattern of distinct centers, surrounded by farmlands and countryside? It is unfortunately getting easier to imagine a continuous commercial strip from Hyde Park to Fishkill, from Poughkeepsie to Pleasant Valley, from Rhinebeck to Red Hook, and along Route 22. Town and Village Boards, City Councils, and Planning Boards have useful tools -- comprehensive plans, zoning laws, and subdivision regulations -- and all the authority needed to ensure that change is for the better.



Random subdivisions on former farmland or more compact residential groupings that save farms and natural areas.



Overly wide and empty residential streets or narrower, tree-lined streets to help slow traffic.



City of Poughkeepsie

Connections in Every Site Plan

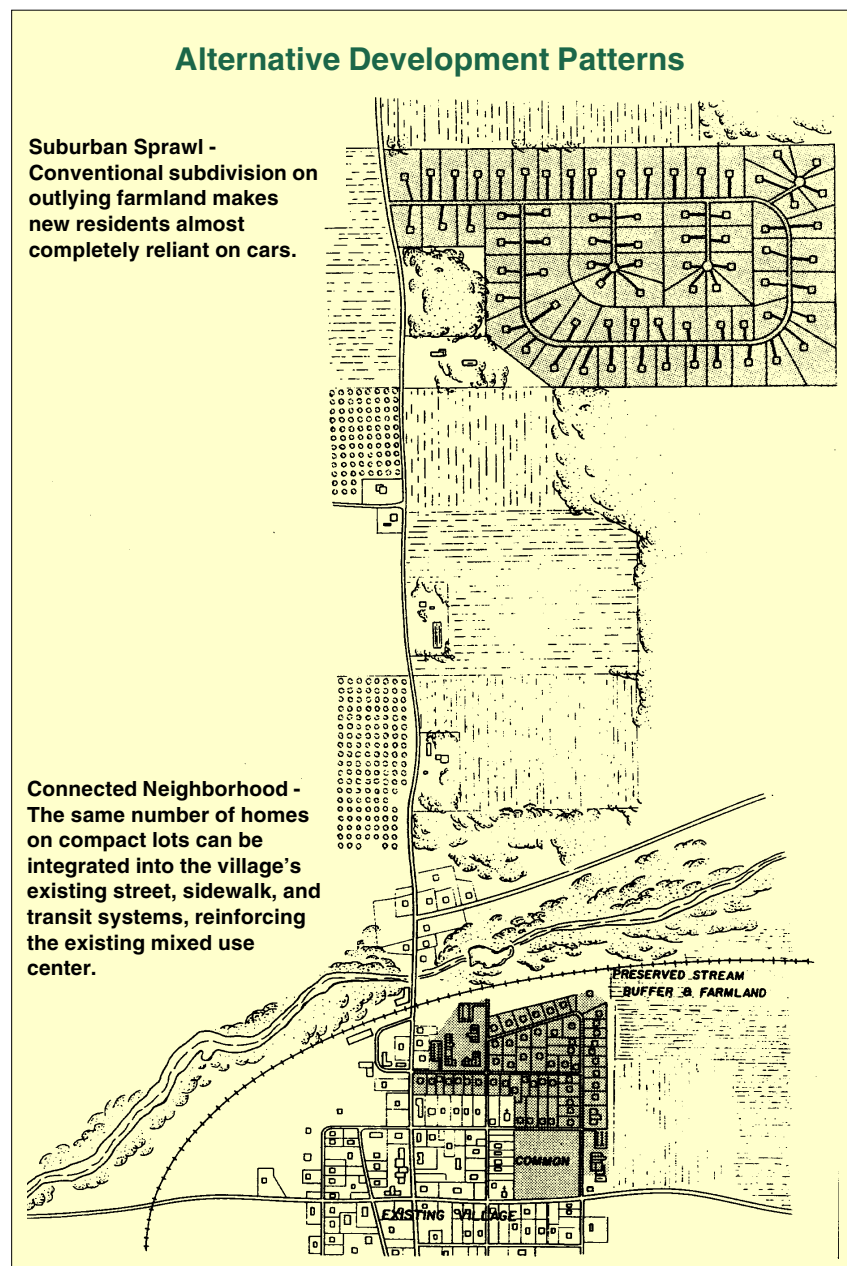
By incorporating Greenway principles into local planning processes, Dutchess County's diverse communities are reinforcing their individuality at the same time they are working toward common regional goals. Every planning choice becomes an opportunity to explore possibilities for creating and reinforcing connections among neighbors.

Local boards can initially assess the wider implications of each project by asking for basic information on the area around the site, such as aerial photographs and/or drawings of surrounding structures and natural features. It is impossible to address relationships to the neighborhood or existing open space when the typical blueprints only show what is proposed within the confines of the property lines.

So first, in a preliminary sketch plan session, look for potential site plan connections:

- **Design an open space system** for the site or subdivision (no matter how small), and integrate it with adjacent natural areas, trail corridors, or landscaping.
- **Protect special site features**, such as mature trees, rocky slopes, stone walls, and streams.
- **Reduce asphalt and limit traffic impacts** with reductions in lane widths, shared access drives and parking, and rear service road connections.
- **Emphasize alternatives to the automobile**, such as mixed use possibilities on or near the site, connections to sidewalk or trail systems, and bike or public transportation provisions.
- **Reflect the architectural scale and details** of the best examples in the community, particularly any existing or nearby historic structures; reject standard anywhere architecture.

Addressing these issues before the blueprint stage is critical to a successful review process. For each rezoning, site plan, or subdivision choice is not only about that particular project; it can be seen as a piece of a long-term puzzle that helps assemble a more attractive and successful community and county.



Ways to Work with Your Neighbors

The Greenway believes that development decisions are best made at the local level. But regional cooperation can often strengthen the hand of local boards and help insure that potentially negative consequences from larger scale projects do not spill across municipal or county borders. Involving your neighbors and different levels of government early on will prevent conflicts or possible jurisdictional disputes from slowing down the process and will build the reciprocal relationships that help in future projects.

Types of projects that are likely to raise intermunicipal or regional concerns:

- large-scale outlets (such as regional shopping malls, mega-stores);
- Uses that may affect water or air quality (power plants, industrial complexes);
- structures with wide visual impacts (power lines, communication towers); or
- substantial traffic generators (large mining operations, truck terminals, major transportation projects).



Looking beyond Municipal or County Boundaries

Mechanisms to enhance communication among partners in the Greenway Compact Program:

- Hold early public forums to gather information and comments from a wider audience before project plans are solidified;
- Resolve jurisdictional disputes up front and help coordinate the permitting process through joint meetings with local, county, and state representatives;
- Designate neighboring communities as interested agencies (or in certain cases involved agencies) during the environmental review process to insure open communication lines;
- Combine board meetings for projects with multiple approvals or on municipal borders so that applicants do not have to make separate presentations and then reconcile conflicting requests;
- Ask groups such as the Harlem Valley Partnership, the Northern Dutchess Alliance, and the Southern Dutchess or Poughkeepsie Area Chambers of Commerce for input on intermunicipal issues;
- Take advantage of the Hudson River Valley Greenway and the recently appointed River Navigator from the American Heritage Rivers program to help make local connections with the state and federal levels.

Streamlining the Process

There are two primary ways to create opportunities for better choices in development decisions. A local board can ask a developer to provide more acceptable alternatives to the original proposal, as for instance is required in an environmental impact statement. While this method sometimes offers an expanded range of choices, it is still reactive, time-consuming, expensive for the applicant, and often merely results in several variations of the same proposal. It also leads to confrontational attitudes and more likely a compromise or watered-down solution rather than a creative alternative. The “best we can get” is not the same as what board members and the public would clearly prefer.

The second, preferred method is for the community to provide design guidelines up front, before developers submit a proposal and invest in expensive engineering. Using the Greenway Guides, towns illustrate the types of development and neighborhoods they are looking for, what generally fits into their community character. Applicants know what site plans and subdivision layouts are more acceptable and are likely to submit proposals the first time that are in line with the guides. Developers make their investment choices based on a more predictable process.

If flexible guidelines are put in place with broad community support and input from builders and other interest groups, constructive negotiations will replace major confrontations. Boards can then accelerate reviews for project proposals, consistent with locally approved guidelines. During the Greenway public workshops, two suggestions that provoked considerable agreement were the need to provide more educational programs for local officials and the benefits of having illustrated guidelines. The towns of East Fishkill and Rhinebeck have already produced illustrated design guideline booklets to aid in the preparation of development plans appropriate for their communities.

The Greenway Guides are designed to allow communities to make essential choices, not as an after-the-fact reaction to each outside proposal, but as preventive medicine for healthier communities.

